

I am writing in regards to the FCC's proposed changes to the telecommunications act. I am a video relay interpreter who would like to voice my thoughts and concerns regarding the proposed changes that would take effect on July 1, 2007.

First, many in congress are probably unaware of the details related to VRS and how VRS has and will continue to influence and shape the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community in the US. So I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize, what I believe to be extremely important points.

As interpreters we are part of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and culture. It is my belief that our skills are only as good as the community we live in. The community accepts, nurtures, and fosters skill development for new and seasoned interpreters alike. My community, like most cities is experiencing the growing pains of VRS. On the one hand, the community cherishes this new resource and availability that VRS offers; however, it has created a local shortage of qualified and skilled interpreters. VRS as an industry must invest in its workforce in order to provide the highest quality services for the community now and in the future. It is imperative that this include a stable work environment for employees, professional development opportunities for seasoned interpreters, AND mentorship, skill building, and internship opportunities for the rising interpreters in the field. Without a three-year budget from the FCC, programs that have been established to meet these goals will surely be short lived and will not achieve their full potential. If VRS companies could invest in their current employees AND recruit and build the skills of newer interpreters the benefits would be numerous. First, VRS would have more skilled interpreters that will be able to meet the needs of our callers, which would mean that more Deaf and Hard of Hearing persons could have access to the service without longer wait times. Second, VRS would be giving back to the communities, from which they are depleting interpreter pools, thus serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities in the cities where their call centers are located. Finally, they would be creating a workforce for generations to come (since the highest qualified interpreters are also the interpreters who have been working in the field the longest it is natural to surmise that these individuals will also be the first to retire or leave the profession).

In addition the rate that VRS companies receive should include monies for training, education, and outreach to the community. Since VRS is so new to the community many Deaf and Hard of Hearing customers are experiencing things about the phone world that hearing people, for better or worse, take for granted. For example, those annoying phone trees we all have to navigate to just to speak to a representative, or getting technical support from an individual with an American name, but a foreign accent. These types of

situations are completely unknown to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. They need to be introduced to the concept, trained on phone etiquette, and encouraged to use the service! This will not be possible if the FCC does not include monies for outreach and training!

Thank you for taking the time to read my comments. I hope that you will consider interpreter comments while making your final decisions regarding VRS.